



United States Attorney District of New Jersey

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HUSBAND AND WIFE CHARGED IN SCHEME TO STEAL GOVERNMENT FUNDS IN THE FORM OF CHECKS FROM THE U.S. MAIL

CAMDEN, N.J. – A husband and wife team in Camden, New Jersey, were arrested late yesterday by Inspectors from the United States Postal Inspection Service and charged with stealing tens of thousands of dollars of Government checks from mailboxes and postal trucks, U.S. Attorney Paul J. Fishman announced.

Nathaniel Johnson, 42, and his wife, Lakisha Scanes, 29, both of Camden, New Jersey, are each charged in separate criminal Complaints with one count of stealing Government funds in connection with an identify theft scheme.

According the Complaint filed and statements made in Camden federal court:

Johnson and Scanes followed U.S. mail carriers while they were delivering mail, and stole various Government checks from mailboxes and postal vehicles, including Social Security, unemployment and tax refund checks. Johnson and Scanes then recruited drug addicts and prostitutes from the streets of Camden, obtained false and fraudulent identification for these individuals in the names of the payees on the checks, and then had the individuals cash the checks at various local businesses in and around Camden. The defendants then paid each recruit a portion of the proceeds from each check successfully cashed. Johnson and Scanes' fraudulent check cashing scheme caused at least \$88,000 in losses from November 1, 2009, through April 29, 2010.

Following their arrests, Johnson and Scanes appeared late yesterday before United States Magistrate Ann Marie Donio in Camden federal court. Scanes was released on a \$100,000 bond, and must appear for a hearing on Friday, May 7, 2010, at 11:00 a.m. Johnson was preliminarily detained on the Court's finding that he posed a risk of flight. A bail hearing for Johnson is scheduled for Thursday, May 6, 2010, at noon before Judge Donio.

U.S. Attorney Fishman stated: "Johnson and Scanes are charged with a scheme to steal money from the Government, and to steal identities and money of ordinary citizens. We will continue to work with our partners to stop those who would treat a mailbox as a personal piggy bank."

Acting Postal Inspector-In-Charge Orie Glenn said, "While mail theft schemes like this are extremely rare, Postal Inspectors work aggressively with local, state and federal agencies to investigate those individuals who steal money from hard working postal customers and violate

the public's trust in the mail.”

If convicted on the theft of Government funds charge, Johnson and Scanes face a maximum potential penalty of 10 years in prison and a maximum fine of \$250,000, or twice the gross gain or loss from the offense.

In determining an actual sentence, the District Court Judge to whom the case is assigned would consult the advisory United States Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining the sentence. Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

U.S. Attorney Fishman credited U.S. Postal Inspectors, Under the direction of Oriey Glen, Acting Postal Inspector-In-Charge of the Philadelphia Division, for their investigation leading to the criminal Complaints. He also thanked the other federal and local agencies involved in the investigation, including the Social Security Administration Office of Inspector General, under the direction of Special Agent-in-Charge Edward J. Ryan, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General, under the direction of Special Agent-in-Charge Jeffrey G. Huges, and the Camden Police Department, under the direction of Chief John S. Thomson. The investigation is continuing.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Diana Carrig of the U.S. Attorney's Office Criminal Division in Camden.

The charges and allegations contained in the Complaints are merely accusations, and the defendants are considered innocent unless and until proven guilty.

10-132

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Defense counsel:

Lakisha Scanes – Lisa Evans Lewis, Federal Public Defender, Camden, New Jersey

Nathaniel Johnson – Justin T. Loughry, Esq., Camden, New Jersey